## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application. Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-18 (Cancelled).

19.    (Currently Amended)  A method of providing fault protection of special purpose devices included in at least one communication network and performing respective functions comprising the steps of:

providing a set of general purpose devices adapted to be configured to perform said respective functions; ~~and~~

including in said special purpose devices a fault handler module; and

in the presence of a function exposed to a faulty condition in any of said special purpose devices, applying at least one of said general purpose devices in performing said respective function exposed to said faulty condition[[.]] by locating said faulty condition in the respective special purpose device by means of said fault handler module and issuing a request for a general purpose device in said set to be applied in performing said function exposed to said faulty condition.

20.    (Cancelled)

21.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 19, comprising the step of substituting ~~by means of a software function performed by a general purpose device in said set~~ a faulty hardware function performed in one of said special purpose devices by means of a software function performed by a general purpose device in said set.

22.    (Previously Presented)  The method of claim 19, comprising the step of transferring resources needed to perform said respective function exposed to a faulty condition to a general purpose device in said set.

23.    (Previously Presented)  The method of claim 19, comprising the steps of: configuring said general purpose devices in said set for resource sharing; and transferring resources needed to perform said respective function exposed to a faulty condition to a general purpose device in said set from another general purpose device in said set.

24.    (Previously Presented)  The method of claim 19, comprising the step of arranging said set of general purpose devices in a distributed system.

25.    (Previously Presented)  The method of claim 19, comprising the step of associating with said set of general purpose devices a distribution center storing code segments adapted to be transferred to said general purpose devices in said set to configure them to perform said respective functions exposed to said faulty condition.

26.    (Previously Presented)  The method of claim 25, comprising the steps of: configuring said distribution center for receiving from said special purpose devices requests indicative of a faulty condition in said special purpose devices; and upon receiving any said request, sending from said distribution center a set of code segments for performing a respective function exposed to said faulty condition to

at least one general purpose device in said set thereby configuring said general

purpose device to substitute the special purpose device exposed to said faulty condition

in performing said respective functions.

27.    (Currently Amended)  A system for providing fault protection of special

purpose devices included in at least one communication network and performing

respective functions comprising a set of general purpose devices adapted to be

configured to perform said respective functions in the presence of a function exposed to

a faulty condition in any of said special purpose devices[[.]]; wherein a fault handler

module is included in each special purpose device for locating said faulty conditions in

respective special purpose devices and issuing requests for a general purpose device in

said set to be applied in performing said function exposed to said faulty condition.

28.    (Cancelled)

29.    (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 27, comprising software code

portions in said set of general purpose devices, said software code portions being

adapted to implement faulty hardware functions performed in at least one of said special

purpose devices.

30.    (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 27, comprising a

communication facility adapted for transferring resources needed to perform said

respective function exposed to a faulty condition to a general purpose device in said set.

31.     (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 27, comprising said general purpose devices in said set configured for resource sharing, and a communication facility adapted for transferring resources needed to perform said respective function exposed to a faulty condition to a general purpose device in said set from another general purpose device in said set.

32.     (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 27, wherein said set of general purpose devices are arranged in a distributed system.

33.     (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 27, comprising a distribution center storing code segments associated with said set of general purpose devices, said distribution center storing code segments adapted to be transferred to said general purpose devices in said set to configure them to perform said respective functions exposed to said faulty condition.

34.     (Previously Presented)  The system of claim 33, comprising said distribution center configured for receiving from said special purpose devices requests indicative of a faulty condition in said special purpose devices, and, upon receiving any said request, sending from said distribution center a set of code segments for performing a respective function exposed to said faulty condition to at least one general purpose device in said set, thereby configuring said general purpose device to substitute the special purpose device exposed to said faulty condition in performing said respective functions.

35. (Currently Amended) A communication network having associated a fault protection system according to any one of claims 27 <u>and 29</u> to 34.

36. (Currently Amended) A computer program product loadable in the memory of at least one computer and including software code portions capable of performing the steps of the method of any one of claims 19 <u>and 21</u> to 26.